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Ex-Soviet military chief reportedly back in favor

By Dusko Doder
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MOSCOW — Marshal Nikolai V. Ogarkov, who was unexpectedly ousted as Soviet military chief of staff and first deputy defense minister in September, was reported by well-informed sources to have made a spectacular comeback in a recent unpublicized shake-up of the high command carried out by Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachov.

According to the sources, Ogarkov, 67, has regained his post as first deputy defense minister and was appointed commander in chief of the Warsaw Pact forces, the Soviet bloc's equivalent of NATO.

His reported Warsaw Pact appointment means, in effect, that Ogarkov has regained one of the three top military positions in Moscow. Moreover, as first deputy defense minister he will be one of the main military policy-makers.

The shake-up also involved the retirement of the commander of Soviet strategic forces, Marshal Vladimir Tolubko, and the current Warsaw Pact commander, Marshal Viktor Kulikov, who was reported to have been assigned to head one of the military academies in Moscow.

Ogarkov, who is known for his



Nikolai V. Ogarkov
To head Warsaw Pact forces

intelligence, poise and extensive knowledge of strategic issues, was summarily ousted in September by the late Soviet leader, Konstantin U. Chernenko.

The year before, he had achieved a rare degree of celebrity for a Soviet official when he held a televised news conference before what proved to be a worldwide audience to charge that a South Korean jetliner shot down by Soviet planes in the Pacific had been on a U.S.-inspired spying mission.

It is believed that Ogarkov had opposed Chernenko's conciliatory stand toward the United States that eventually led to the resumption of the Geneva arms talks. But it was unclear whether the return of Ogarkov reflected a revival of the hard line in the Kremlin.

Ogarkov also is reported to have favored a strengthening of the technological capacities of the Soviet Union's conventional forces while the official Soviet military position emphasized buttressing the nuclear stockpiles.

Although there was no official confirmation of the changes at the Defense Ministry, the sources said the shake-up was extensive and involved the retirements of a number of old senior officers, including Col. Gen. Alexei Yepishev, 76, who was replaced as head of the political directorate of the armed forces by a younger general currently serving in East Germany.

Because of his age and poor health in recent months, the retirement of Yepishev was described by the sources as routine.

At the time of his ouster in September, an official statement said Ogarkov was relieved "in connection with a move to other duties" — which were never disclosed.